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SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHANGING EMPHASIS IN FOREIGN MISSIONS

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The word devolution has come to be familiar in missionary parlance. We know what it is meant to express; viz. the transfer of authority and responsibility in the Christian enterprise from the mission and the missionary to the Christian forces of the land. While we know this change is coming it is doubtful if we realize how fast and how far it has already come.

It is not equally advanced in all mission fields. There is no devolution at present in the wide Turkey field, because with the expulsion of the Armenians and the Greeks from Turkey and the turning of effort there toward the Turks there are yet no national Christian leaders to assume responsibility. There is little that can be called devolution now in Rhodesia or in the West Africa field, although reports of the part which preachers and church officers in West Africa are taking in the planning and conduct of church work suggest the coming of the change there also.

In general, devolution is clearly developed and is advancing rapidly in the mission fields of the American Board. In Japan it has come to full flower; is accepted of all; and the alterations involved therein are well established. In China, under pressure of the nationalistic movement and the civil revolution, plans which had been for years projected and cautiously undertaken were suddenly speeded up until a transformation has been wrought almost over night. Here adjustments have had to be far more rapidly considered and undertaken than in the case of Japan, with the result that relationships and procedures are still in some cases rather chaotic and call for further consideration. India is moving more slowly but with unquestionable certainty and with growing momentum towards a similar transfer. In Ceylon the Board is actually accomplishing reduction in missionary forces and Mission responsibilities by the organizations of the Tamil Church.

What is happening on these fields in Asia is coming in measure also in some of our smaller or less conspicuous fields. It is noteworthy, for example, that this process of devolution is pushing forward in our Mission to the Philippines, one of the younger and less adequately developed fields of the Board, where missionaries have been few and Mission appropriations have been meager, so that we have hardly met at all the requirement of bare occupation of the field. Yet Christian communities that have been won are coming fast to self-determination and support. On the North Coast of Mindanao it is reported we have now thirty churches in the villages and small towns, with twelve salaried pastors; and as to expenditure, 3/5 of the Board's appropriation for work in this area, that is, $3,750 out of $5,200, is now in the hands of the Church. A committee of four, with only one missionary on it, approves the budget, and approximately sixty members connected with these churches distribute the funds. They are asking for no increase of grants now for the maintenance and development of this Christian establishment. The work is taken over and carried on by the church organization.

Even in Micronesia where the people are simple and undeveloped in the carrying of responsibility and where missionary influence and direction are therefore more to be depended upon, it appears that these little churches in the Marshall Islands raise all the funds necessary for the support of their pastors, the larger and stronger helping out the weaker ones, so that they are themselves carrying the cost of maintaining their modest expenditures and are in the way of assuming increasing responsibility for the Christian movement in their area.

The extent to which this process of devolution has already gone in American Board fields is indicated by the fact that nearly two-thirds of the Board's missionaries are now working where the change has come from the dominance of the Mission to the administration of the organized church; this is to say, in figures, 400 out of the 628 missionaries are working under these changed conditions. And by the Board's annual report for 1927, $980,000 out of $1,457,000 were spent in fields where this transfer of responsibility is under way. Most of this change has come to pass in the last ten or a dozen years. The movement was well under way before that in Japan. But practically this altered situation in the conduct of our missionary work has come about within a decade.

And the movement will not turn back. Whatever we may think about it, it is here and here to stay; rather to go forward. If in some cases it seems to us too hasty a transition, - if we feel that devolution like evolution should come normally by gradual and tested changes, if we recognize some infelicities and misdirection in the process, we cannot deny the movement and we must not block it. Surely our duty is to recognize the divine leadership in this development in the foreign missionary undertaking, so like the transition from infancy to adolescence and so on to maturity, observable in the development of every human life, and to seek to meet the new situations wisely; cordially to make such adaptations as are called for in mission policy and to shape our relationships and procedures by the requirements of the new era.

It is to some of the implications of this changing emphasis in foreign missionary work today that I have now to call the committee's attention. It will be impossible within time limits to point out all these lines of development, much less to discuss them adequately: it will be enough for the present perhaps to indicate how deep and wide a change in missionary administration is impending.

1. First of all we must recognize the great difference in the degree of devolution already attained in the several fields and in the organization and plans by which the Christian forces in these fields are now operating: For example, the process in Japan is far more developed than it is in India. The Riji, that is the organization by which the Kumiai Churches in Japan are directing their effairs, relating the activities of missionaries to them and the distribution and use of grants made by the Board for work in that land, has far more fully accomplished a solution of the problem than has the movement in this direction in either of our missions in India.

Moreover, the organizations and methods by which the process of devolution is being accomplished in Madura are quite different from those in the Marathi Mission. The two India fields are not alike in their method; not even in the attitude back of the method. I cannot take time to explain in detail the difference between the prevailing policies in the Madura and Marathi Mission, and it is not necessary in order to make the first point which I wish to emphasize, viz. that the Board in its handling of administration in these lands where devolution is coming to pass cannot deal with them all in the same way. It must realize the different grades of attainment and the different ways in which the several fields are seeking to work out their independence. The policies should be adaptive and flexible, realizing that they are temporary and that it is a period of experimentation. Consistency, uniformity, precedent are not to be the guiding stars by which to sail the ship in these new seas into which we are passing. There needs to be room for variety and for conformity to conditions and tempers, which may be transitory and yet compelling for the time being. Let us seek to find the best way we can to deal with a period that is recognized as one of transition and alteration.

2. Another implication of this changed condition in our mission enterprise looks towards the Board's welcoming a direct presentation of estimates and requests from these new church organizations on the field rather than from the mission. As is already the case, for example, in China the estimates are now made up by organizations where the nationals share in judgment and in vote and in many cases are in the majority. Is it to be expected that these estimates and requests for Committee action should be continuously forwarded to the Board through the Mission; or even beyond that dependent upon the O.K. of the Mission? Does it not seem clear that the new era must lead to direct dealing between these bodies and the Board's offices on matters that have now been definitely turned over by the Mission to such organizations of the Church?

It may be said that there will be dangers connected with such a change; that a spirit of self-seeking may prevail; that different attitudes towards business obligations may cause trouble; or that a casual handling of financial responsibilities would be likely to involve waste or loss. It is true that in one of our Mission fields where the oversight of Church work and the elementary schools connected therewith was committed to an organization composed predominantly of the ministers of the churches, one of the first acts upon assuming responsibility was to vote an increase to the preachers' salaries, although some other lines of work had to be cut in order to provide for this increase to themselves. Such procedure may seem discouraging or perhaps amusing; but it may be remembered that not so long ago in the assembling of the United States Congress for a new session, one of the first acts of the senators was to vote an increase of salary to themselves; and, if I remember rightly, only one senator declined to take the increase.

Unquestionably there will be mistakes, some losses, some disappointments in the working out of the new method, but we cannot hope to make a transfer of responsibility and authority and at the same time dilute the responsibility and fetter the authority. The unescapable point of concern is that we are compelled to change our methods by a change of situation on the field.

National leaders, men and women now being in charge of institutions or distinctive lines of work, desire to correspond directly with the Board's officers; to set forth their plans and purposes, to confide their troubles, to state their problems and their needs so that they may feel themselves to be actually in touch with the Board and the administration of its work. The trend towards direct approach on the part of the native workers on the field, as they are assuming responsibility and exercising authority, is unmistakable and must sooner or later be met. Moreover, as the move towards church unity advances in Mission lands, it is evident that the Board will have to be dealing with its work as bound in with the general Christian movement, officered and directed by church organizations on the field. As you know the churches connected with the American Board's Marathi Mission are now a part of the United Church of India North and are recognizing themselves as sharing in its organization and conforming to its procedures. For years the Churches of the Madura Mission have been firmly established as a part of the South India United Church. This movement toward union is going on in other lands. We are told that, so strong is the tendency toward union in the Philippines, it is expected that the churches which have been connected with the several Boards doing work there will soon be brought into one united church. It is said that the Missions have already come to an agreement to this end and that most of the churches and pastors are in line for it; that delay is only in the hope that in a year or so the few pastors who are reluctant in the matter will fall into line and that the union will be cordial and complete. It is obvious that as this movement towards union continues, the American Board will at length be addressed by and called upon to consider overtures from the Church of Christ in China, the Church of Christ in the Philippines, etc. We must lay our plans for tomorrow, not for today alone; and act accordingly.

3. A third line of required adaptation in the process of devolution affects the status of the Christian leaders of the land in their relations with the missionaries and the mission organization. At a recent meeting of the Prudential Committee, Mr. Edward Fairbank of the Marathi Mission, speaking of the acute racial sensitiveness of the people of India as affecting the Christian community, and the feeling of Christian leaders, that they were not really "on the inside" with their missionary associates, raised the question whether the Board should not "go the second mile" and make the trained and experienced national leaders members of the Mission. He spoke with earnestness and sympathetically of the sensitiveness of the Indian pastors and other leaders over what they felt was a galling inequality. The policy of the American Board from the beginning has been that its missionaries should be in all cases foreign missionaries; that national leaders, however able or

eminent, could not properly be made members of the Mission which was not designed to be a permanent or indigenous organization in the land, but was expected to decrease while the native church and its organization increased. Missionaries come and go, Mission prerogatives are in the process of time reduced or terminated. The churches of the land with their developing organizations are to be regarded as the permanent factor in the missionary movement. So the Board has believed and its action has corresponded thereto. For myself I believe it is the right attitude and the right procedure. It is noticeable that the desire for such inclusion of national leaders in the Mission organization is suggested only from India and from the Marathi field in India. The development is distinctly away from that idea in Japan, China and practically all other fields. But what prompts this suggestion is the feeling that somehow the missionary must not seem to have a separate or superior status to his brother of the land who is his comrade in the work, and who indeed represents the church to which is passing the responsibility and authority for the conduct of that work. I believe there are ways of readjustment which will secure the desired sense of equality and full fraternity without denying the obvious difference between these two classes of workers. But whatever is the decision to be reached, it is clear that the coming forward in responsibility and authority of Christian leaders in these Mission lands is calling for a new consideration of the relationships and these who are their brethren and fellow workers of the land.

The implications of devolution are bound to affect the Board's administration at the Home Base as well as on the Mission field. Having mentioned three points at which changes may be required in relations and procedures abroad, may I suggest as many cases where adjustments may be required in promotion among our constituency at home.

4. One effect that is bound to come, in almost all these fields of devolution, grows out of the Board's assent to the proposal that the new organizations on the field, which are made up largely. (in many cases preponderantly) of representatives of native churches and their leaders, shall express their mind upon the return of missionaries to the field after they come home for furlough. It is practically accepted that in the face of an adverse vote on the part of these organizations on the field the return of missionaries will not be authorized by the Board. As that becomes known and is appreciated by those who are candidates for missionary service, as they find that the Board cannot assure them life service, or even continued service beyond one term, there will come an increasing tendency, already manifesting itself, for candidates to propose that they shall go simply for a short term of service until they on their part, as well as those with whom they are working, shall decide that the adventure is successful and that they should receive full appointment.

That is to say we are facing the possibility that in view of this progress of devolution on the field we may have to change our attitude and our policy somewhat as regards the securing of missionaries.

5. Another change which is to be anticipated in the promotion of our foreign missionary work at home grows out of the increasing native leadership on the field. We are familiar with the fact that the support of missionaries is at present being carried to a large extent through their attachment to individual churches or groups of churches in our supporting constituency; something like 540 of the 628 missionaries of the Board are now assigned to churches or groups of churches or to individuals in a real relationship. Their names appear on the church calendar; correspondence goes back and forth between the church and its missionary; visits are made by these missionaries to their churches before going to the field or during their furlough period. Many special gifts or personal remembrances go out from these churches to their representatives abroad. The tie of this relationship is not uniformly close or fully realized but it is an important and productive factor in the support of the Board's work and the maintaining of foreign missionary interests. Now as men and women of China and India and at length of Africa and other fields are brought into positions of leadership and of high responsibility by the taking over of work which formerly missionaries were doing, or by entering into newly developed and important lines of endeavor which require superior qualifications and at such cost as cannot be met by the local Christian communities on the field who are struggling to maintain their own churches and elementary schools, shall way be sought similarly to relate these native leaders on the field to churches or individual givers in this country? And if such relationship is to be secured what will it involve? Will it not require the bringing of many of these leaders from Mission lands to make acquaintance with our churches and givers in this country; for a course of further study it may be, or for service in deputation work; for the securing of contacts in some way and to such degree that supporters in this country shall be inclined to form these direct and close ties of relationship between the work on the field and the constituency at home as have been developed in the relations of missionaries to the Home Base. It has been said that it never will be possible to maintain the interest of the churches at home in the work abroad except through the medium of these missionaries who are known and carried upon the hearts of their supporters here and through whom they visualize the field and the work. Now the missionaries will continue; their number should increase. Many must be kept longer than can be foreseen in the fields where devolution is coming to pass; they will of course be needed in no less number, rather in larger number, where devolution is not yet under way; and there are wide and unoccupied fields inviting our entrance. But the growing number of nationals whose posts of leadership must be aided from abroad constitute a serious concern in our missionary problem which we shall have to face and face with largeness of spirit and vitality of faith in the Christian movement if we are to adjust the missionary enterprise to the new era which is coming. In some way we must provide that the church at home shall become genuinely and devotedly attached to the church abroad rather than to the Mission as an organization or the missionary as its representative. Can we adapt our project plan to taking in these native leaders of the field and these lines of work into which their activities open, so that the emphasis in promotion at Home shall change with the changing emphasis in the conduct of the work abroad? Certainly it would seem possible since we have already 10 such native leaders on the Project List.

6. One more implication of the process of devolution which is quite similar to the one just named is the change that will gradually come about in the emphasis on appropriations of the Board. In the making up of the budget of appropriations for the year 1929, which you are to vote upon tomorrow, the Board is being called upon to enlarge its provision for what we have called Native Leadership; that is to say for the aiding of those leaders of the land, of whom I have just spoken, to whom is being transferred, in part, work which hitherto has been the care of the missionary, or would so have been considered. From the North China field alone comes a request for grants for 1929 for eighteen such native workers, - heads of schools, supervisors of districts, men and women for one and another line of responsibility. Fourteen of these eighteen requests are recommended for granting. The total request for these fourteen workers involves appropriations of about $8,000 which is a pointer as to comparative expense.

The widening field of Christian work in Mission lands, the diversity of undertakings, is one of the most obvious and impressive facts of the present-day missionary situation. Few things I am sure would strike the visitor who should travel around the American Board's fields today more than this, that not only in different missions but in almost every one of the stations of the missions he would find some piece of work, some experiment in applying the Christian Gospel or serving the community that is distinctive. It has grown up in the area because of conditions that have been manifest, or of a special vision or interest (not always of the missionary) and is being worked out with a devotion which makes a particular contribution to the missionary enterprise. Nothing can be more false to the fact than to suppose that Christian work on Mission fields is a uniform thing, of the same methods and activities operating everywhere. It is to be expected, therefore, that as experiment and application continue there will be some change of stress in appropriations of the Board; there ought to be a frequent re-evaluation of the work that is being done, fresh appraisal, that should lead to alterations in the budget of appropriations. If, for example, we are to look more and more to native leadership, then the schools of training - divinity schools, teachers' training schools, nurses' training schools, trade schools, agricultural courses, etc. should be objects of increasing regard in the granting of appropriations. It will be the institutions and the lines of work that tend to inspire and to prepare the native forces that will come to command particular attention from the Board in the survey of its work abroad. Or, again, with the development of schools and the increase of literacy as there grows a larger constituency who are able to read, the field of Christian literature, of publication and distribution of good reading, not all of it distinctly religious, but with the Christian spirit and standards and ideals reflected therein, is of ever increasing value. Encouragement of authorship, the promoting of publication on the part of native Christian men and women of vision and of literary gifts, would be of high value and is coming to be a matter of prime concern in not a few of our fields. What can be wrought through community work, rural betterment, extension dispensaries, etc. is now being recognized in every mission land.

These lines of work and others in which the devotion and ability of the Christians of the land can find expression and which will utilize some of those who may not be qualified for the highest forms of work in schools or church, suggest another avenue of activity that will call increasingly for new interest and support.

I have used the allotted time; and am conscious with you that only the surface of the subject proposed has been touched. Much more could be said on all the points that have been noted, not to speak of others that have been left unnoticed. Much more will be said I trust in the discussion to follow. But the main intent of this statement was only to indicate the fact that changes, many and serious, are beginning to be pressed and will yet more be pressed upon this Board in the way of readjustment in its policy and method both at the Home Base and on the Mission field, in dealing with a new era in missionary work in which devolution is coming to pass so rapidly and so surely. If it disturbs and perhaps dismays us a little, as we confront somewhat suddenly the altered situation of missionary work today, it may even more thrill us to think of the great advances to come; and challenge us to put our best, our most devoted and Christian spirit, into the attempt to discover such adjustments as shall conserve what has already been attained while clearing a way for the larger gains which in the providence of God we feel to be just ahead.

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Statement from the Prudential Committee of the American Board. 1928.